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AUTHOR Peterson, Tammy Wiens; Borden, Michael Ray
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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the use of qualitative methods to determine first-year student perceptions of the Orientation program delivered by North Carolina State University. One hundred thirty freshmen were interviewed, in groups of 6 to 10, to learn about their orientation experiences, and why they felt some sessions were helpful, and where sessions could be improved. The team of interviewers then met in focus groups to discuss common themes of the sessions and to interpret students' perceived needs. The greatest benefit from the qualitative method was the understanding gained of students' perceptions about orientation. Some of the concerns expressed were in areas of: (1) the amount of time spent with an advisor; (2) getting registered for the first semester; (3) learning their way around campus; (4) the large size of their orientation groups; (5) the length and format of sessions; (6) and the lack of an organized event to help students meet each other. Options for responding to these concerns included: adding four orientation counselors; re-designing the campus tour; renewing concern for the academic advising process; and adding an organized social event. Appendices include the questionnaire used and characteristics of the students who participated. Contains six references. (GLR)

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Student Perspectives on Orientation:

The use of qualitative research in evaluating Freshman Orientation

Department of Student Development
North Carolina State University
Tammy Wiens Peterson, Assistant Coordinator
Michael Ray Borden, Assistant Director

January 14, 1993

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The traditional means of evaluating the NCSU Orientation program has been a written survey of participants at the end of orientation. After evaluating the results of the 1991 Orientation program, it became apparent that a quantitative measure was not providing us information to assess student perceptions of the program. In order to better evaluate freshman orientation through the eyes of first year students, a qualitative evaluation method was developed.

Methodology. Freshmen who participated in orientation were interviewed to learn about their orientation experiences, and why they felt some sessions were helpful, and where sessions could be improved. 130 students were interviewed in groups of 6-10 during a one hour session. The team of interviewers met following the interviews to discuss common themes of the sessions and to interpret students' perceived needs. The interviewers' notes for each of the 18 interview sessions were compiled so the data could be reviewed in its entirety.

Interpretation of the data is one of the major differences between qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative analysis is somewhat subjective because the researcher must decide how to present the story. The validity of interpretation in qualitative research is maintained in at least two ways. First, validity is preserved through the use of verbatim quotations of those interviewed throughout the report. Those who read the report are able to experience orientation in the same way the freshmen who were interviewed experienced it. This permits readers to make their own judgments as to whether the conclusions reached logically follow from the data collected. Second, validity can be demonstrated through saturation of data. This occurs when

interviewers begin hearing the same perceptions repeatedly in the interview sessions.

Conclusions. The greatest benefit derived from the qualitative method was the understanding gained of students' perceptions about orientation. This understanding now provides a backdrop for changes and enhancements to our current orientation program. The interviews with students enabled us to assess the concerns of entering freshmen. Some of these concerns were: the amount of time spent with an advisor, getting registered for the first semester, learning their way around campus, the large size of their orientation groups, the length and format of sessions, and the lack of an organized event to meet other students. Options for responding to these concerns include: adding four orientation counselors, re-designing the campus tour, renewing concern for the academic advising process, and adding an organized social event.

This was the first qualitative attempt to draw on the experience of program participants to evaluate the program in detail. The use of focus groups in viewing the program through the eyes of these students provided a wealth of information about what the goal of Orientation should be, where the foci of students' concerns lie, and how the current program can be enhanced to better meet the needs of students in their first semester of college.

INTRODUCTION

Orientation is about transition. The focus of most freshman orientation programs is on preparing students academically and socially for the new and unfamiliar setting of a college campus. Recent research indicates that "participation in orientation enhances academic achievement, retention, and personal development" (Upcraft, Finney, and Garland, 1984, p. 93). These are positive signs that Orientation is mutually beneficial to the students and the institution which they attend. Resources such as the Council on the Advancement of Standards (CAS), and professional organizations such as the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA), also affirm practitioners' efforts in providing orientation programs that enhance student's successful integration into college life. Even the best orientation program, however, must be evaluated to determine its effectiveness. "No matter how carefully planned and executed, programs that freshmen do not consider beneficial are not effective" (Upcraft and Perigo, 1989, p. 93).

Traditionally the means of getting student feedback at North Carolina State University (NCSU) has been a written survey by participants at the close of orientation. After evaluating the results of the 1991 Orientation program, it became apparent that a quantitative measure was not answering enough questions to thoroughly evaluate the program. Specifically, the quantitative approach was not demonstrating how well the orientation program was helping freshmen make the adjustment to the first semester of college. In order to better experience freshman orientation through the eyes of first year students, a qualitative research method was developed.

The focus of the qualitative study was to investigate student perceptions of freshman orientation on students' academic and social adjustment in the first semester of college. The research project was designed to obtain a first-hand

account of first year students' impressions of Orientation. Although qualitative research takes a variety of forms, an interview method seemed most suited to the needs of the NCSU program. The use of focus groups rather than individual interviews held particular appeal because this approach would allow access to the greatest number of students in the shortest period of time. Focus groups also provided the advantage of being able to "promote interaction among group members, such as reacting to one another's comments, building on ideas, or offering contradictory impressions" (McMillin, Whitt, and Kuh, as cited in Whitt, 1991, p. 411). The results of the 1992 evaluation demonstrate that the interview approach yields far richer data than any previous data from a quantitative method.

METHOD

***Selection of students**—In June 1992, 2,601 students attended Freshman Orientation. The goal was to obtain a diverse sample population that reflected the larger student population. The Director of the First Year Experience program agreed to permit interviews of student participants in this program. This is a one year volunteer program to which all freshman students have an opportunity to apply. Students accepted into the program are required to register for a multi-disciplinary course, MDS 101[1]. There are 20 sections of MDS 101 with maximum enrollment of 20 students in each section. 130 students in nine sections were interviewed (See Appendix A).*

***Data Collection**—The qualitative data was collected using a focus group process. Each of the nine MDS 101 sections were split into two groups. This produced 18 focus groups of 6-10 students. One interview was conducted with*

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[1] Multi-Disciplinary Studies 101 is a two semester freshman seminar course designed to assist students in making successful academic and personal transitions.

each focus group. Two interviewers facilitated each group in a one hour meeting. Students in each section were asked a standardized set of questions (See Appendix B for questions). The questions were developed using information collected through pre-orientation[2] and post-orientation surveys[3] (See Appendix C and D for surveys and results). These surveys helped determine what students were expecting from an orientation program and where their greatest concerns lay.

***Interviewers**—Each interview team consisted of a facilitator and a recorder. The facilitator led the interview session and the recorder took notes of what each person in the group said. The interview teams were made up of Orientation Counselors, student affairs staff, and graduate students in the student development program. The Orientation Counselors provided a constituent of interviewers who were familiar with orientation and thus "more likely to be credible to the insiders in the setting and so may have to devote less time to gaining their cooperation and trust" (Whitt, 1991, p. 408). A half day training session was required for all interviewers prior to the interview sessions. The training session allowed for consistent and appropriate interviewing techniques across all interviews. After the completion of all the interview sessions, the Orientation staff met with the interviewers to discuss and process the results of the interviews. The goal was to bring structure and meaning to the mass of collected data.*

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[2] Pre-evaluation Survey—A pre-evaluation survey was included in the orientation registration materials sent to all incoming first year students, asking what concerns and perceived needs students had prior to arriving on campus for June Orientation. The results indicated that registration and other academic issues were what students wanted most from a freshman orientation program. The person they see as having the most potential for impacting their success in their first year of college was a professor. The biggest obstacle they saw in their success was managing their time and developing good study habits.

[3] Post-evaluation Survey—During check-out on the final day of June Orientation students were asked to fill out an evaluation. The results indicated the three things students benefited from most were the Registration Workshop, Registering on TRACS, and the Meeting with their Orientation Counselor. (See Appendix C)

DATA ANALYSIS

The interview questions provide a natural outline for the discussion of the research. The first two questions were broad, open-ended questions that allowed students to get comfortable with the idea of being interviewed (See Appendix A). These questions also gave the interviewers time to establish rapport with students and demonstrate they would not be judging students' responses or looking for particular answers.

***Perceptions of College Life**. Question one asked students how college life differed from their life prior to college. Four themes emerged in the responses students gave: freedom and responsibility, quality of life, difficulty of college courses, size of classes/campus.*

Freedom and responsibility. In relating aspects that are different about college life, over one third of the responses had to do with issues of freedom and responsibility. Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand as is highlighted by one student's comments: "You can stay out as late as you want to (freedom), but you have to go to class and do homework (responsibility). So, you have to control yourself." And his classmates response, "Ditto. I'm responsible enough to do it (responsibility). I like it (freedom) better." The freedom of college life as expressed by students is freedom to sleep when you want to, get up when you want to, come home when you want to, show up for class when you feel like it, and buy all the junk food you want. Freedom in students' minds is getting one's own way. Responsibility is realizing that getting your own way means paying for your own bad choices and therefore having to curb your freedom. Comments such as, "what you get out of college depends on what you put into it," and, "You have to learn to set limits," support this understanding. Responsibility is characterized by expressions like, "becoming an adult," "being in control," "self-reliance," " learning to live without your

parents," " figuring out how to use extra time." Freedom and responsibility are generally seen as good things but some students expressed, as Anita did, that "freedom is almost overwhelming, " or admitted, as Carl did, being "anxious about being in control."

Quallity of Life. The second most popular response by students related to "quality of life." Things that stand out in the minds of students when thinking about how living at college is different from living at home are : "no air conditioning;" "no TV;" "bad water;" "bad food; "sharing a bathroom;" "doing your own laundry;" "not having a car;" "living with someone;" "miss my cat;" "miss my family." Students miss home and the comforts of home. They are confronted with the challenge of living with "strangers" and learning how to share their belongings and living space with people who may not be like them.

Difficulty of College Courses. Other responses had to do with the difficulty of college courses as compared to high school courses. Some of this difficulty has to do with the perceptions of professors. "Professors don't care about you one quarter as much as high school teachers." Some of this concern has to do with anxiety about the importance of a college education. "If you mess up academically here, it's more serious than high school." Most of the difficulty, however, seems to come from the increased expectations of a college professor's course work. "Have to study now, and I didn't in high school." "I can't keep up." "High school was more structured." "I have to read twice as much." "You have to be more focused."

Size of classes. Finally, a difference students noticed between college life and their life before college is the size of the classes and the campus. Many students come from towns with populations smaller than the campus population. They believe that the size of the place makes it impersonal and difficult to meet people. "I don't know where things are." "I have to do more on

my own." "Different cultural groups are a new experience. I wanted the large crowds because where I come from is very small. I sometimes can't help but feel like a number."

Neither the difficulty of college nor the size of the classes were as great an issue as were the quality of life and the freedom and responsibility issues. These four themes were consistent in all eighteen interview sessions .

***Resources for Managing Change**. The second question asked students who or what had been the best resource for them in dealing with change. Almost half of the students said their Metcalf Residence Hall UCA (Upper-class Advisor) or their RA (Resident Advisor) had been the most helpful. The UCA/RAs socialize with them, help them get to class, help them with their homework, and help them deal with being in college. Many other students mentioned a friend, a roommate, a sibling, or a peer as their best resource for dealing with college. A few students mentioned an organization such as "the band" or "my fraternity" as being helpful to them. Only a handful of students mentioned an adult as being a source of help in adjusting to college life. In fact, out of 127 responses only 6 adults were mentioned as a source of help: "my uncle," " Ms. Y, the Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies," "my advisor," "Mr. X in Registration," "my parents," "my grandma." More than double the number of students said "no one" or "self" than said an adult had been the most helpful to them. Cyndi said, "It's your own journey. No one else knows what they're doing either." Comments such as, "Don't need a lot of help but know it's out there if I need it," "It's all me...I've always done things by myself," characterize those who feel they are pretty much left to their own devices to survive the college experience. For some, this attitude comes with a sort of pride in being able to handle oneself. "I got a newspaper and some sport schedules and went over to Broughton [High School] for a soccer game.*

There's always something to do." In contrast, for some this attitude reveals a kind of loneliness and isolation. "I mostly stay in my room. I'm bored. I want to go home."

Reflections on the Orientation Program. *Questions three and four provided the backdrop for the most direct discussion of the orientation program. Question three focused on what students remembered about Orientation without any prompting from the interviewer. During question four, on the other hand, students were given an actual schedule with a brief description of each session. After a moment to look over the schedule, interviewers asked students what changes, additions, or enhancements they would make to the program. Many of the responses to question four were similar to those of question three. For example, issues related to advising, registration, and the length of the program in general dominated the discussion in both questions. The added benefit in giving students a printed schedule was that it allowed for specific comments on almost every program on the schedule. In some instances, programs that were mentioned in question three received fuller, more concrete discussion once students looked over the schedule.*

Academic Advising. *In both our pre-orientation and post-orientation survey (see Appendix C and D) the topics of registration and advising were a priority with students. It was not surprising that these two received the most attention from students during the interview sessions as well. Students clearly have a lot of anxiety about their schedules. One has only to look at the interview transcripts to see that much of students' motivation in attending orientation is to meet their advisor, learn how to register, find out what courses they will be taking, and find out how to get to the buildings in which those courses will be held.*

Students expressed disappointment that they were not able to spend one-on-one time with their advisor. Their expectation in coming to orientation was that they would meet a faculty member who would meet with them individually and address their specific questions. Instead, according to students, the Meet with Advisor session consisted of waiting in long lines to get a PIN # [a personal identification code assigned to a student so that he/she has personal access to the telephonic registration system (TRACS)] and spending only a minute talking with the advisor as he or she handed them the number. The following quotes from the interviews characterize this sentiment: "There were too many people in one place for there to be any quality advising;" "It wasn't helpful, it was just a mad dash to get PIN numbers;" "I didn't get anything out of it, I just got my PIN number and no advice." A handful of students were pleased with the help they received from their advisor. Generally, students from smaller colleges who met with their advisor in groups of 5 or fewer expressed the most satisfaction with the advising assistance they received. Students desperately want help with their schedules and some reassurance that they are registering for the "right" classes. "I showed my schedule to my advisor and he just said, "Uh huh, uh huh, here's your PIN." "They just give you a sheet of requirements. I needed more than a brief description of my classes." "I needed more help with my schedule and getting the right classes. I wasn't sure who to ask about it." Some students said they would have preferred to talk with upper-class students in their major. Clearly they wanted someone who could answer specific questions they had about their schedules.

<u>Registration</u>. The second most popular topics for discussion were the Registration Workshop and Registration on TRACS. Students believe that these two sessions are the most important sessions orientation offered them. The registration workshop "taught us what we needed to know." Most felt as

Kortnei that "I could not have imagined trying to figure out TRACS on my own," and Bert, "I probably wouldn't have gotten through that if someone hadn't shown me how." As with the Meet with Advisors session, students said "the groups were too large" and that "we should have had some one-on-one help with scheduling." Most students felt they needed more personalized attention to get their questions answered. There was a great deal of frustration with the process of registering on TRACS[4]. Students didn't like "waiting in long lines," "classes all seem(ing) to be filled," or "registering so late into the evening." Students had several recommendations for how to improve the registration system. Most commonly they suggested that NCSU "add more TRACS phone lines." Some suggestions were more concrete, such as Mickey's suggestion to have "phone lines available all through the day, instead of just at night." Students also requested having more personnel available to answer questions as they dealt with the TRACS system. This year was the first time freshmen were pre-registered in core courses before coming to Orientation and students were appreciative of this service.

Campus Tour. Another crucial aspect of the orientation program for students was the Campus Tour. Students are eager to see the campus and learn their way around. Many felt the program was too tightly scheduled so that, apart from the Tour, they were not allowed enough time to see the campus. They anticipated the Tour but felt it was not thorough enough. "The tour was too fast. We didn't get to touch the buildings." Toni thought it would be good to "give us a map and have us find out for ourselves" (how to negotiate the campus). Juanita would have liked "to go inside the class buildings." Many students wanted to look inside the residence hall in which they would be living.

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[4] A special phone bank was set up for students to use during a specified time during Orientation so that students could register on the Telephonic Registration Access to Computerized Scheduling (TRACS).

Some would also have liked an off-campus tour that would acquaint them with local banks, the post-office, hair-styling shops, and the like, as well as some of the more social aspects of the city of Raleigh.

Orientation Counselors. One of the most helpful features of Orientation which students identified was their Orientation Counselors (OCs). "I learned the most by walking around and asking my OC..." "OCs were the biggest help..." "They were informative and entertaining." "...helped out with all my questions and told me what to expect." "Mine (OC) told me the underneath stuff. Not just the stuff from the lectures." It appears that the Orientation Counselors were able to fill some of the student desire for more personalized attention. The OC groups fell short of students expectations when it came to help with their schedules. Students wished their OC could have been from their particular college, or been more acquainted with their particular major. And again we heard the complaint that the groups were too large.

Freshman Celebration. The session that received the harshest criticism was the "Freshman Celebration."[5] Students felt deceived by the title. "I thought it was going to be a party." "It wasn't much of a celebration." Students were hoping for an organized social event and what they felt they got was "a lot of fat and no beef." Students thought this session, in particular, was unnecessary. Students did not like the use of the session to showcase the Arts at NCSU. There were a few students who enjoyed the program, but they were the exception to the rule. Discussion of this session often led to a more general discussion of the length and format of other sessions.

Length and Format. Most students were frustrated and bored by staying in one meeting place for the bulk of the workshops. They wanted more

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[5] The Freshman Celebration was a jointly presented program by the Student Center (music, theatre, visual arts and crafts) and Student Development. The Student Center focused on the Arts at NCSU and Student Development on recognition of the freshman class.

movement. Students also thought there was too much activity packed into each day. They wanted more time between sessions to explore the campus and do things on their own. The format of the sessions was also uninspiring to students. They wanted different types of sessions, i.e., "not all lecture." Several comments were made to the effect that all the "essential" sessions should be offered on one day and all the "optional" sessions offered on the second day. Although there was some difference of opinion as to what was "optional," there was general consensus that registration and meeting with advisors was "essential." The session that was continually mentioned as being too lengthy was the Freshman Welcome and Curriculum Information. Students thought this session "could be cut in half." Other comments about the Freshman Welcome were: "It's like going to a play. You don't like it but you sit through it anyway." "...you just stopped listening after awhile." "It was too long with no breaks." Students wanted to have more of a choice in attending the programs they deemed important—especially since the schedule did not allow them any free time to do other things they felt were important during their time on campus.

Suggested Changes. When asked if there was anything they would add to the program students unfailingly requested an organized social event. What this event would consist of varied from something as informal as "opening the gym," or holding a "cookout" to the more extravagant idea of "a dance, and a live band." Some of the desire for a social event arose out of wanting an organized evening event. For others, the idea of having a good time was their main reason for coming to orientation and they would be socializing whether an organized event was sponsored or not.

Closing Comments. At the close of the interview students were given an opportunity to add anything they wanted to say about orientation. Programs that received limited, nevertheless positive, comments were How to Succeed at

NCSU, Celebrating Our Differences, Relationship Dynamics, and Student Development's part in the Freshman Celebration. Often students recognized their feedback had been critical of the orientation programs and admitted that generally they had enjoyed orientation. What characterized orientation as a good experience for them was simply the opportunity to be on the campus and meet other students. "Just being here was a good idea." Students also suggested that while the programs may be good, the bottom line is that college is an adjustment "that no information session can fix for you." There is always some aspect of learning to manage college that "you can't be told, you just have to go through it."

***Summary**. The most significant discussion centered around registration, advising, campus tours, and the length and format of the programs. The impersonal size of the groups and the lack of support students felt in not having their questions answered seemed to be the greatest disappointment students felt with Orientation. The Orientation Counselors were most often cited as meeting students' needs for personalized attention but fell short when it came to dealing with students' anxieties about their class schedules. Students enjoyed the focus groups and felt genuinely enthused that someone had taken time to hear from them first-hand instead of through a written survey.*[6]

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The first two questions interviewers presented to their focus groups were designed to build rapport. It was interesting to find that the answers students gave to these questions painted a picture of first year students similar to the

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[6] Note: The African-American Symposium which is held the day before Orientation received high praise from all students who mentioned it. Though the program was not listed on the orientation schedule it was often one of the first things mentioned in the interviews when students were asked what stood out in their minds. The Symposium is making a substantial positive impression on first year African-American students.

picture one would see with a general knowledge of student development theory. The answers to questions three and four, however, go beyond this general picture and provide insight into the specific program at NCSU. In light of the answers to questions three and four there are three areas around which discussion of the orientation program will focus: 1) changes in current orientation program items; 2) proposed additions to the current orientation program; 3) new ideas that are in keeping with the spirit of the interviews.

Changes in Current Program. *There are three areas of change to the current program that deserve attention as a result of the research interviews. The first, and greatest, area of concern to students is academic advising. The lengthiest discussion in every interview session centered around the Meet With Advisors session. This concern mirrors national opinion. Susan Frost (1991, p. 44), in her research on academic advising found that, "Freshmen identify advisers as being among the most significant personal contacts they make." At NCSU, faculty contact has not been provided for the students at the level they would like, or that is sufficient to make them comfortable with their class selections. This is especially true during a summer orientation program when the faculty are largely unavailable. Change must occur not only because NCSU students are asking for more time with an adviser, but also because "there is substantial evidence that freshmen who develop relationships with faculty are more likely to succeed than those who do not (Perigo and Upcraft, 1989, p. 84)." Naturally the more sustained the contact the greater the effect—which can be said of any programming effort during Orientation. "Nevertheless, even short, pre-freshman orientations may exert a positive indirect effect..."(Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p. 404). That is to say, even the two and half day program NCSU offers in June can enhance students' academic success.*

There are two ways in which Orientation can strive to better meet the needs of students with respect to advising. The first is to better equip the students. A handbook should be prepared that will provide a quick and easy reference for registering for the first semester. Upcraft et al. (1989, p. 89) suggests that "programs are more successful if well-designed written materials are provided in advance." Students are likely to come to orientation with a set of well-framed questions if they have had an opportunity to do some advance preparation for planning their fall courses. The second solution rests in having more faculty available. Perhaps there are incentives that can be offered which would encourage faculty to participate in greater numbers.

The second most talked about topic in the interviews was the length and format of the orientation sessions. The bottom line for students is that they sat in the same auditorium for most sessions and heard material presented in basically the same way. Whether or not they actually heard the same thing every time is not the issue. The fact that they heard it in the same place and delivered in the same manner made it seem like they were getting more of the same. The remedy for this is to move the students around a little more. Sessions throughout the program can be offered in two or three locations. The length of sessions can be altered so that some are only 45 minutes and others 60 or 80 minutes. Programs with less traditional formats can be interspersed with the straight lecture presentations to give students some relief from the typical classroom style.

A third change in the current program which comes as a result of the students' recommendations is to liven up the Freshman Celebration. This session focused too much on the Arts at NCSU and not enough on the freshman class—which was actually the intent of the program. Students complained that the term "Celebration" was deceiving. Perhaps the name of the

session did as much to contribute to their disappointment as the actual session itself. In any case, the program will undergo some revisions to shorten it and give it a snappier tempo.

Program additions. *Possible additions that the orientation program should consider making to meet students' needs are a focused campus tour and a social event. Not ironically, students comments on these two areas reflect the needs of their particular developmental stage. Moore, Peterson and Wirag (1984, p. 41) stress the importance of offering programs to students in a developmental sequence. "Traditional entering students need to become familiar with the physical setting of the campus...they also need to get acquainted with other entering students." A campus tour is already part of the orientation schedule. In order to make it more meaningful to students the tour needs to take them to the places in which they will spend most of their time. In other words, instead of taking them to "tourist attractions," the tour needs to focus on where they will live, learn, study and eat. Students want to get a peak inside their residence hall, walk in the building that houses their classrooms, know they can find the library, and see their other dining options. In order to facilitate these desires, as well as to make it an enjoyable experience, the program directors are trying to make the tour into somewhat of a scavenger hunt. Possibly each OC group could be given a mock course schedule, and a map and then each group would track down each of the rooms on their schedule. The idea is to prepare students for finding their way around campus in the fall. The tour needs to take a more pragmatic look at students' anxieties about the size of the campus and not just give them historical information about the campus.*

The second item to consider adding to the program is an organized social event. The orientation program takes seriously the mission of preparing

students for the transitions they will make once they arrive on campus in the fall. It strives to find a balance between serving the psycho-social and academic needs of students. It is in keeping with the goals of orientation to offer students an opportunity to meet other students in their class. It also seems reasonable since students are spending two nights on campus that they can expect some sort of an organized social activity to be offered on at least one of those evenings. The program might be something as simple as "Movies on the Lawn," or as extravagant as a live band and a dance. At any rate, some sort of social function should be incorporated into the schedule.

A third addition to the present program is the hiring of additional Orientation Counselors. A common theme in every interview session was the impersonal nature of the size of the groups. Students want more personalized attention. They also tend to have anxiety over appearances. Even in a group where everyone knows as little as every other person, there is a lot of discomfort about asking questions. A smaller group would allow students to ask questions they really need to ask but are too intimidated to raise in a large group. Budget concerns allow us to add only four counselors at this time, but ideally there should be enough counselors to allow a maximum of 20 students per group.

***Approaches to Orientation Programming**. These interviews also spawned new ideas about how to approach Orientation programming. For example, the interviews confirmed that attendance drops off considerably as the orientation program progresses. Although it was not a surprise to hear students tell us what sessions they did not attend, or hear of their waning interest as the program came to a close, the students' voices renewed interest in finding solutions for the retention problem. One possibility under consideration is the use of "Orientation Bucks" that students can "earn" by attending sessions.[7] This*

[7] The idea of Orientation Bucks was introduced at the national NODA conference in Kansas City, in October 1992.

currency could be used at a later orientation function to bid for items in an auction.

The intense nature of research of this sort uncovered a new perspective on the administration of orientation programs. Orientation is one component of a larger student experience. Although orientation takes place in a specified time frame, the planning behind the program should take into consideration how it fits into the broader scope of the first year experience. The administration of an orientation program should be linked to a larger coordinated effort that can be sustained throughout the first year of a student's college life. There needs to be some sense of which staff or department is picking up where orientation leaves off and how the follow-through is being accomplished.

LIMITS OF THE RESEARCH

Research of this type always generates thoughts about changes in how the research was carried out if one had it to do over. One quite simple change that should be made is the use of audio or video equipment. The interview sessions were recorded solely by human instruments. This yielded an accurate impression of the interview session and several verbatim quotes. It did not, however, yield the same precision and thoroughness that an electronically recorded session would offer. Although recording interviews in this way would be more timely and more costly, it would be worth the investment to have the interviews preserved in their entirety.

***Suggestions for Future Research**. In looking ahead to future research on the orientation program, it seems that an additional source of data could be found in spending more time with the students. The researcher should be more involved with students during the month of June when the Orientation program*

is held. Perhaps it would be possible to interview a focus group two or three times throughout the three days of the Orientation program. This could be done at each of the five sessions held in June. Other interviews could be held with first year students at the end of their first week on campus to follow up on the findings of the June research. There is still much to learn about the success of Orientation in helping students make the transition to college life. A qualitative approach is by far the richest tool for sharing the students' perceptions of the program.

It is important to take note of the breakdown by college in our interview sample (See Appendix A). In most areas of the orientation schedule all students from all colleges attend the same sessions. Each college, however, is responsible for its own academic advising. There is some reluctance, therefore, to draw conclusions across colleges with regard to advising since no method was in place to distinguish students' comments as reflective on a particular college. For example, engineering majors made up 44.5% of the students interviewed. This is higher than the 30.9% that make up the freshman class. This statistic, as well as anecdotal evidence, may suggest that there is a higher degree of dissatisfaction with regard to advising within the College of Engineering than within other colleges. Future studies should consider tagging the data on advising to specific colleges.

Finally, evaluation of the program should include a comparison of students who participate in orientation with those who do not attend. In order to thoroughly understand how Orientation is enhancing students' integration into the academic and social community, there should be an understanding of how students who do not participate in the program are faring.

SUMMARY

The value of this study was hearing first-hand accounts of students' experiences of Orientation. The Orientation program has always relied on written surveys to get information from students. These quantitative results were not an adequate resource when it came to implementing new sessions or considering how Orientation might be improved. There are strong professional associations in the field of Orientation, both at the regional and national levels. The program has had the benefit of these associations for inspiring new programming ideas and affirming the success of current ones. Never before, however, has NCSU tested its program from within. This was the first attempt to draw on the experience of program participants in order to evaluate the program in detail. The use of focus groups in seeing the program through the eyes of these students provided a wealth of information about what the goals of Orientation should be, where the foci of students' concerns lie, and how the current program can be enhanced to better meet the needs of students in their first semester of college.

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Appendix A

Percent represented by student sample interviewed (Column A) versus total percent in the freshman class (Column B):

	A	B
BY RACE		
White	67.2	80.9
Native American	1.5	0.7
African American	26.3	12.4
Asian	5.1	3.7
Hispanic	0	1.2
Other	0	1.1
BY COLLEGE		
Agriculture & Life Sciences	21.9	19.4
Design	2.2	2.1
Education & Psychology	0.7	3.3
Engineering	44.5	30.9
Forest Resources	2.9	3.4
Humanities & Soc. Sciences	12.4	13.2
Physical & Math. Sciences	9.5	8.8
Textiles	3.6	7.6
Management	2.2	3.7
BY GENDER		
Male	59.1	60.3
Female	40.9	39.7

Appendix B

Interview Questions

(Est. Time)

(10 min.) **1. What changes have you experienced, or what changes have you had to make, in a college setting?**

Probes: Independence (having to make your own decisions) or Interdependence (peer pressure, study groups, living situation)
Diversity, sharing living space, classroom space with someone from a completely different background
Other: Study habits, Classes are harder, Size of classes
Finances, Time Management, Homesickness, Roommate (Sharing a common space), Finding your way around a new place, Make new friends

(5 min.) **2. What or who has been most helpful to you in making those changes?**

Probes: Professor/Advisor
Roommate Parents Resident Advisor
Student Services (Student Develop., Counseling Ctr., Women's Ctr., etc.)
Student Organization (First year experience, teaching fellows, fraternity, mentor program)

(10 min.) **3. In thinking about Orientation, what stands out in your mind about the program that was helpful in preparing you for your first few weeks on campus? Explain.**

Probe: Issue	Session
Time management	How to Succeed
Finding your way	Campus Tour
Student services	Information Fair
Schedule	Meet Advisor, Curriculum Info.

(35 min.) **(Hand out Orientation schedule with session descriptions)**
4. In looking over the schedule what programs stand out in your mind?
a. In other words, if you had the power what programs would you enhance, build upon? Explain.
b. which would you cut? Explain.
c. what programs might you add? Explain.
d. which would you leave as is? Explain.

Probes: If the issue is....	*Then did you do "x" at Orientation*
Finding my way around campus	*Campus tour*
Knowing how to register	*Registration Workshop*
Help with my schedule	*Meet with Advisors, Curriculum Information.*

**If the issue IS covered by Orientation, did it adequately address the issue*
**If the issue IS NOT covered, how might we address it at Orientation.*

Appendix C

Pre-Orientation Survey Questions
(see accompanying tables)

1. Below is a list of possible topics that could be covered at Freshman Orientation. Please rank , in order of importance to you, the top 5 topics that are most likely to benefit first year students. ***See Table C-1***

Registering for classes
Campus tour
Music auditions
Meeting my roommate
Talking with my advisor
Personal safety skills
Freshman Celebration (learn NC State history, *alma mater* , etc.)
Financial aid
Learning more about the African-American culture
Greek life information
Extracurricular opportunities
Residence life information
Dining options on campus
Explanation of TRACS registration system
Workshop: "Have I chosen the "right" major?"
Learning how to communicate with others of a different race

2. I feel the most valuable resource for my success at NCSU will be: (rank order top 3) ***See Table C-2***

Peer Mentor program
African-American student affiars
Women's Center
my academic advisor
meeting upperclassmen in my major
Dean of my college
joining a fraternity/sorority
my Residence Hall director
joining a club/team/fellowship
the Counseling Center
the Department of Student Development
my suitemates
my professors
Other (please specify)

3. I think the biggest obstacle to my success at NCSU will be: (rank order top 3) ***See Table C-3***

managing my time
the size of the classes
making friends
choosing a major
finding my way around campus
developing good study habits
being exposed to new & different ideas
missing my family/friends
related to issues of race/culture
related to issues of gender
Other (please specify)

Table C-1

QUESTION #1						
N=350						
	1ST RANK=	2ND RANK=	3RD RANK=	4TH RANK=	5TH RANK=	TOTAL
	5 PTS	4 PTS	3 PTS	2 PTS	1 PT	PTS
REGISTERING	950	86	28	22	10	1096
FINANCIAL AID	230	39	29	36	20	354
ADVISOR	130	69	49	42	33	323
CAMPUS TOUR	80	26	40	35	40	221
RESIDENCE LIFE	50	17	43	50	52	212
ROOMMATE	70	36	46	29	27	208
EX/CURICULAR	30	20	37	52	63	202
MAJOR	115	17	20	18	18	188
TRACS	50	22	21	17	17	127
DINING	5	5	7	14	27	58
MUSIC AUD.	20	2	3	2	6	33
GREEK LIFE	0	2	11	12	8	33
SAFETY	5	1	7	8	10	31
AF-AMERICAN	10	4	4	2	8	28
CELEBRATION	5	2	1	4	6	18
DIVERSITY	0	2	4	7	5	18

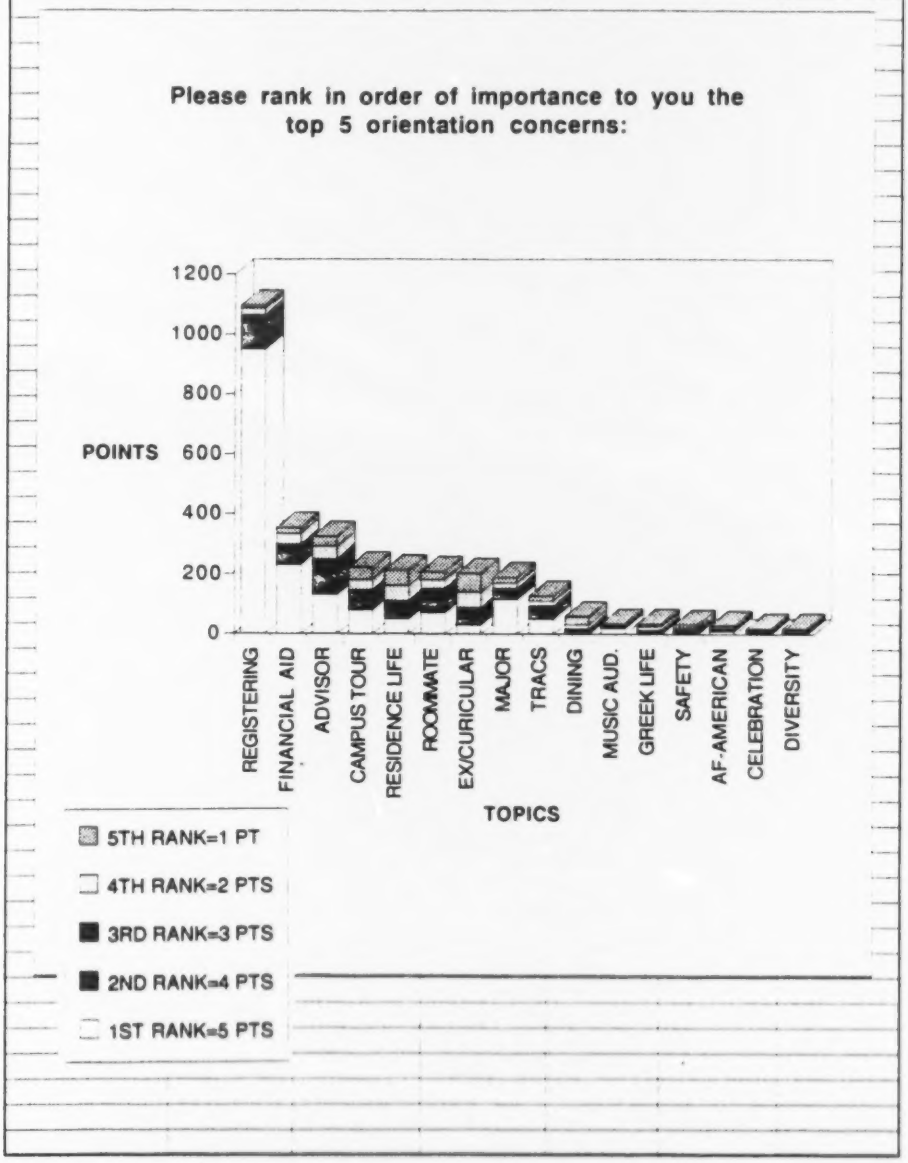


Table C-2

QUESTION #2
N=350

	1ST RANK= 3 PTS	2ND RANK= 2 PTS	3RD RANK= 1 PT	4TH - 15 TH RANK= 0	TOTAL PTS
PROFESSOR	156	56	41	0	253
ADVISOR	58	63	47	0	168
LIBRARY	33	60	47	0	140
ROOMMATE	31	35	52	0	118
UPPERCLASS	20	43	32	0	95
CLUB	15	36	38	0	89
STUDENT DEV	6	19	20	0	45
COUNSELING	7	11	21	0	39
MENTOR	8	12	9	0	29
AF-AMER. AF	9	5	3	0	17
FRATERNITY	1	1	15	0	17
RES. HALL DIREC	0	6	8	0	14
OTHER	5	2	6	0	13
SORORITY	1	0	10	0	11
WOMEN'S CTR.	0	1	1	0	2

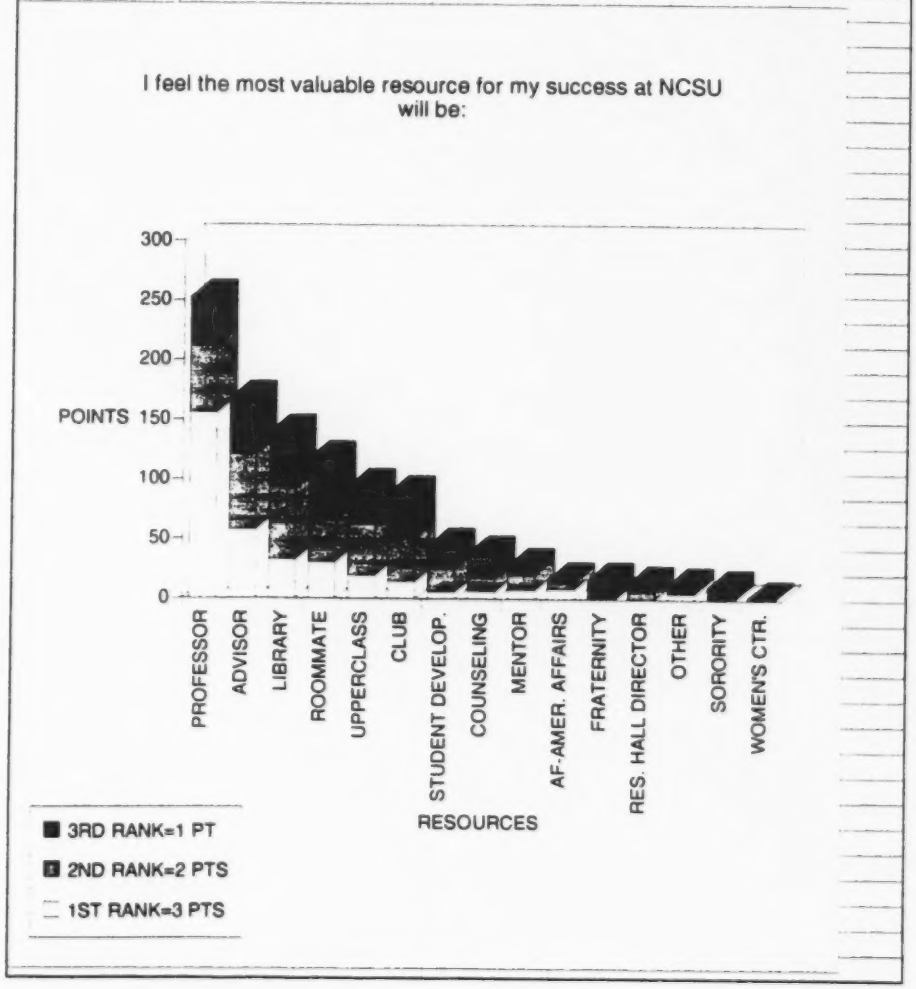
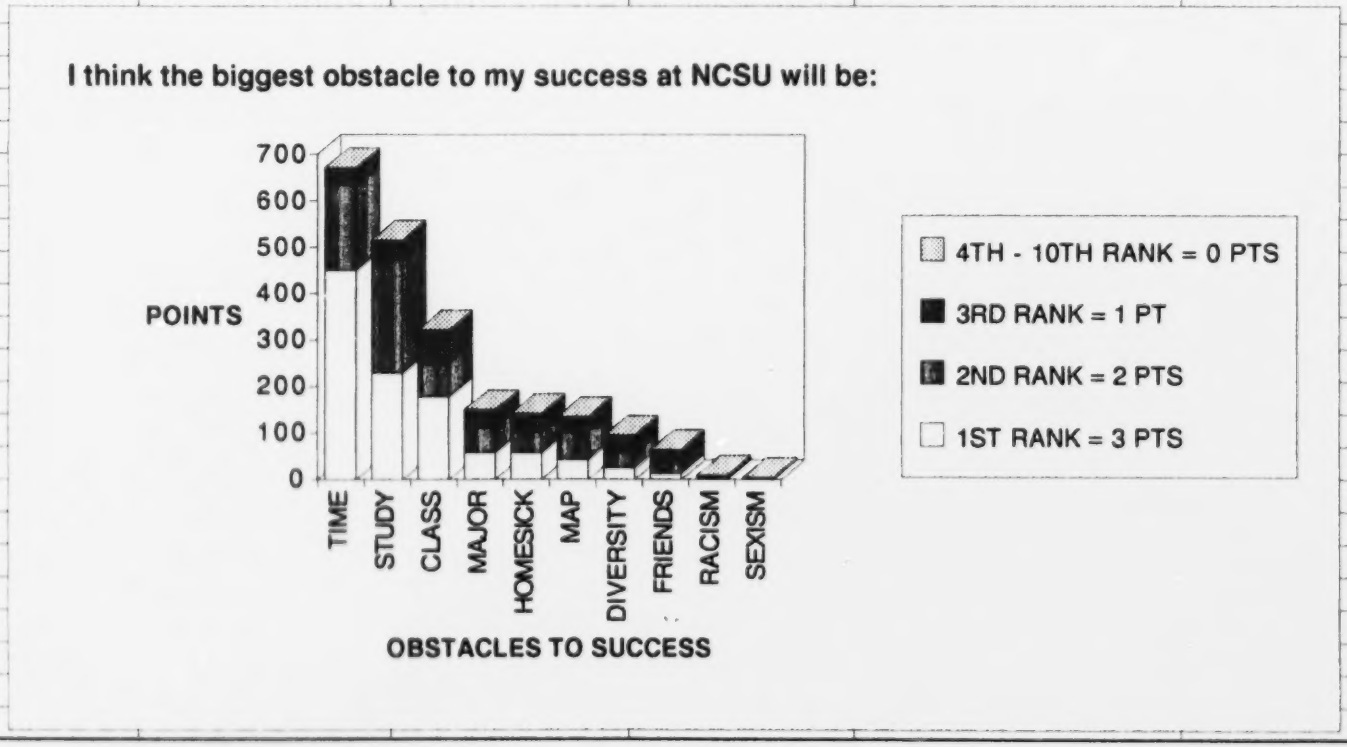


Table C-3

QUESTION #3					
N = 350					
	1ST RANK = 3 PTS	2ND RANK = 2 PTS	3RD RANK = 1 PT	4TH - 10TH RANK = 0 PTS	TOTAL POINTS
TIME	450	182	39	0	671
STUDY	228	240	47	0	515
CLASS	177	70	74	0	321
MAJOR	57	52	40	0	149
HOMESICK	57	44	40	0	141
MAP	42	58	34	0	134
DIVERSITY	24	30	40	0	94
FRIENDS	12	20	32	0	64
RACISM	3	2	3	0	8
SEXISM	0	2	1	0	3

Table C-3



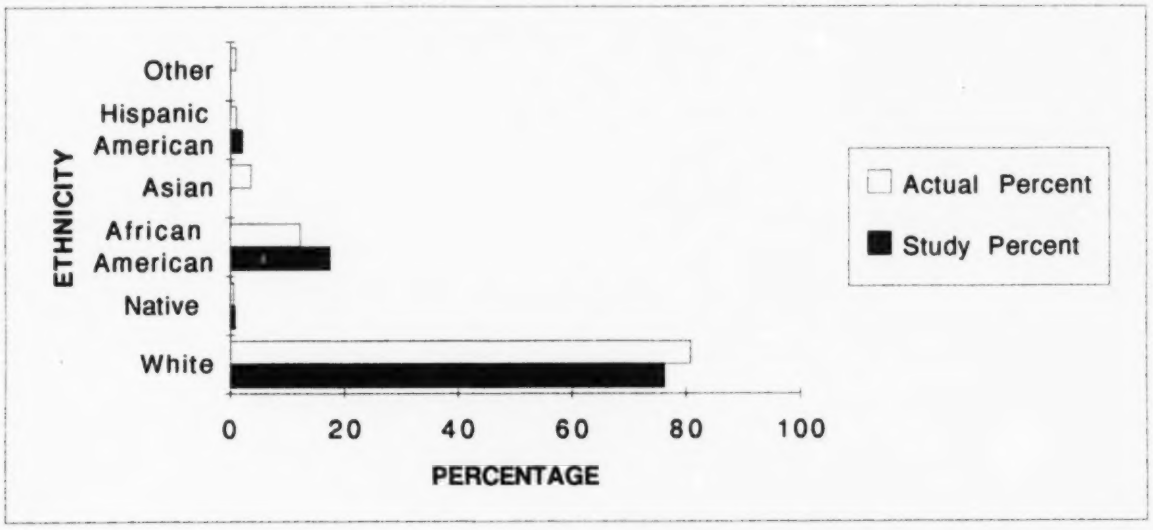
BY ETHNICITY

N=350

	Study Percent	Actual Percent
White	76.3	80.9
Native	0.8	0.7
African American	17.6	12.4
Asian	3.0	3.7
Hispanic America	2.2	1.2
Other	0	1.1

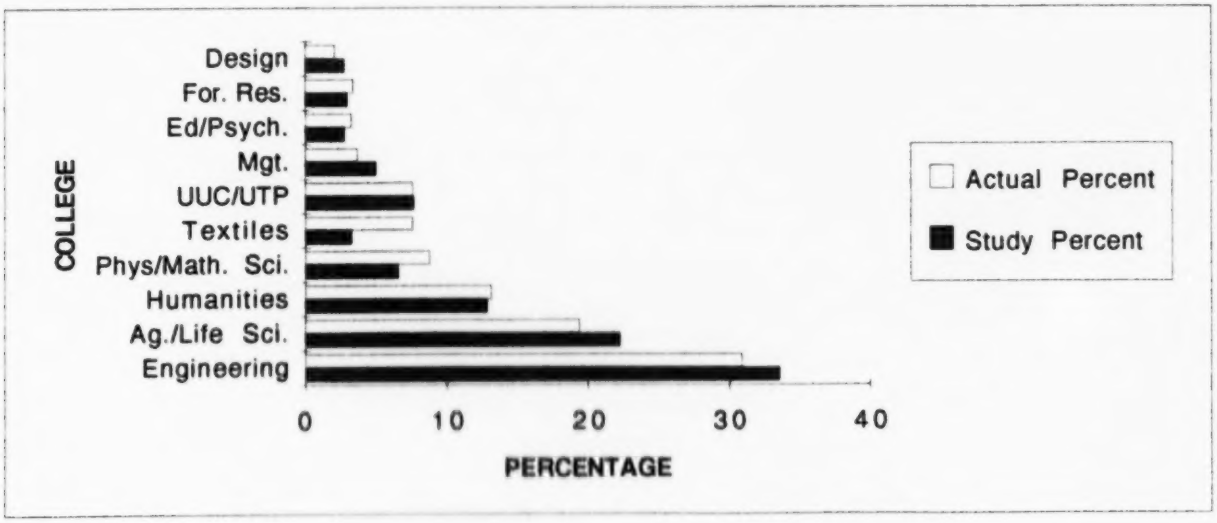
BY GENDER

	Study %	Actual %
MALE	57	60.3
FEMALE	43	39.7



BY COLLEGE

	Study Percent	Actual Percent		Study Percent	Actual Percer
Engineering	33.6	30.9	UUC/UTP	7.7	7.6
Ag./Life Sci.	22.3	19.4	Mgt.	5.0	3.7
Humanities	12.9	13.2	Ed/Psych.	2.8	3.3
Phys/Math. Sci.	6.6	8.8	For. Res.	3.0	3.4
Textiles	3.3	7.6	Design	2.8	2.1



Appendix D

Post Orientation Survey Question
(see accompanying tables)

Below is a list of all the sessions offered at Freshman Orientation. Please choose the 5 sessions you feel offered the greatest benefit to you as a first year student. (Rank the best session as #1, the second best session as #2, and so on, up to #5)

_____ *African-American Symposium*

_____ *Meetings with Orientation Counselor*

_____ *Freshman Celebration*

-- session recognizing the freshmen class, NCSU history, alma mater

_____ *Freshman Welcome And Curriculum Information Session*

_____ *Foreign Language Placement Test*

_____ *Music Auditions*

Special Interest Sessions

____ *Career Planning & Placement*

____ *Cooperative Education*

____ *Financial Aid*

____ *Student Leadership Opportunities*

____ *Fraternities & Sororities*

____ *Intramural Recreational Sports*

____ *Study Abroad*

____ *Religious Life*

_____ *Information Fair --reps. from Student Affairs and other student services areas*

_____ *Relationship Dynamics & Sexual Etiquette 101*

_____ *How to Succeed at NCSU*

_____ *Celebrating our Differences*

_____ *Registration Workshop*

_____ *Campus Tour*

Student Meetings

____ *University Scholars*

____ *Student Athletes*

____ *First Year Experience*

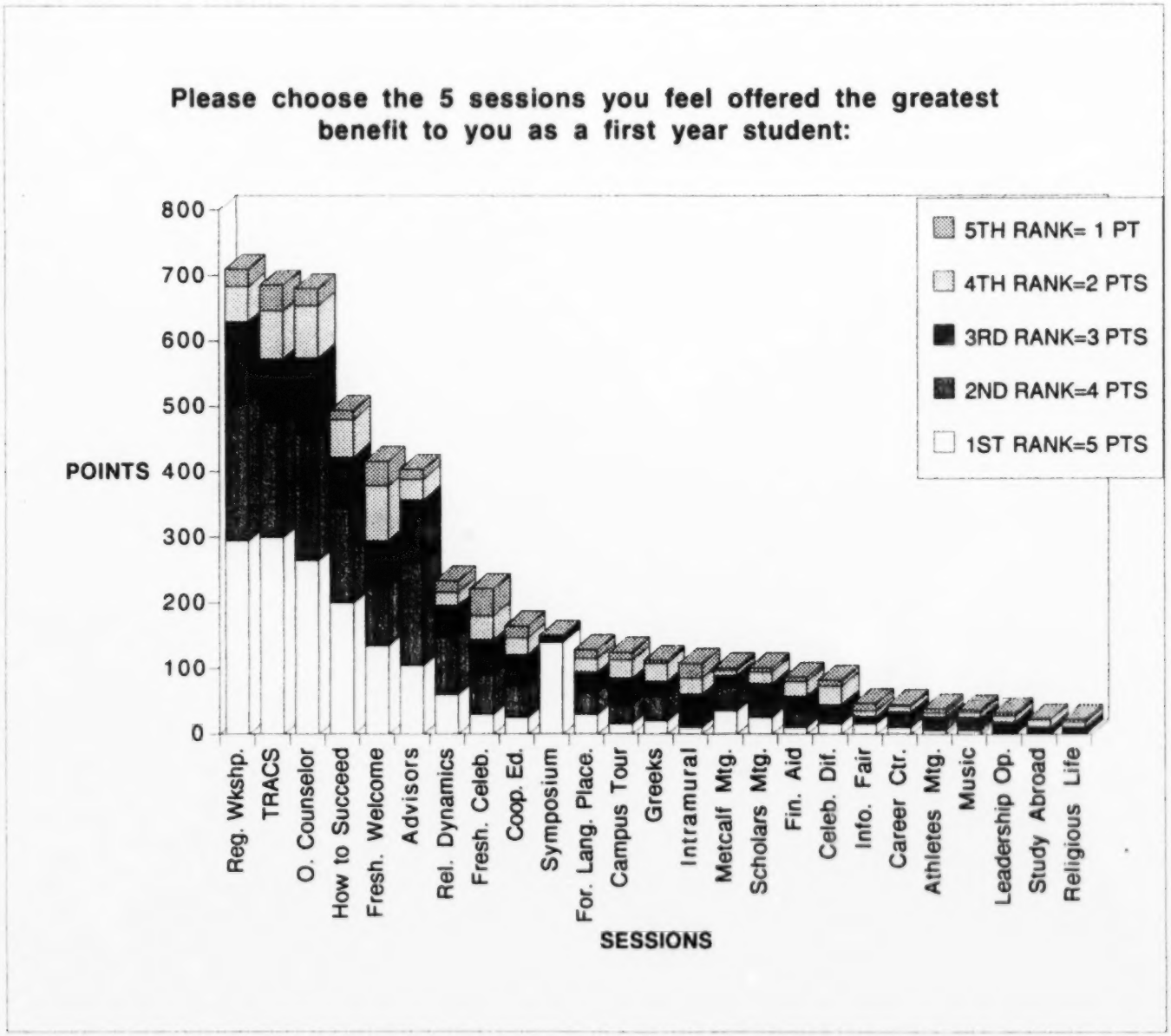
_____ *Meet with Advisors*

_____ *Registration on TRACS*

Table D-1

N=350						
Post Question						
	1ST RANK=5 PTS	2ND RANK=4 PTS	3RD RANK=3 PTS	4TH RANK=2 PTS	5TH RANK= 1 PT	**TOTAL PTS**
Reg. Wkshp.	295	208	126	54	27	710
TRACS	300	176	96	74	39	685
O. Counselor	265	192	117	80	26	680
How to Succeed	200	144	78	58	14	494
Fresh. Welcome	135	88	72	84	37	416
Advisors	105	156	96	32	15	404
Rel. Dynamics	60	88	48	20	18	234
Fresh. Celeb.	30	60	54	36	42	222
Coop. Ed.	25	48	48	26	18	165
Symposium	140	4	6		1	151
For. Lang. Place.	30	32	33	20	14	129
Campus Tour	15	28	42	28	12	125
Greeks	20	36	24	28	4	112
Intramural	10	12	39	24	23	108
Metcalf Mtg.	35	36	18	8	4	101
Scholars Mtg.	25	16	36	18	6	101
Fin. Aid	10	24	24	22	7	87
Celeb. Dif.	15	12	18	28	9	82
Info. Fair	15		12	8	12	47
Career Ctr.	10	12	12	8	3	45
Athletes Mtg.	5	12	9	6	6	38
Music	5	8	12	8	4	37
Leadership Op.			18	10	4	32
Study Abroad		4	6	12	1	23
Religious Life		4	6	8	4	22

Table D-1a


Please choose the 5 sessions you feel offered the greatest benefit to you as a first year student:
POINTS
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
5TH RANK= 1 PT
4TH RANK=2 PTS
3RD RANK=3 PTS
2ND RANK=4 PTS
1ST RANK=5 PTS
Reg. Wkshp.
TRACS
O. Counselor
How to Succeed
Fresh. Welcome
Advisors
Rel. Dynamics
Fresh. Celeb.
Coop. Ed.
Symposium
For. Lang. Place.
Campus Tour
Greeks
Intramural
Metcalf Mtg.
Scholars Mtg.
Fin. Aid
Celeb. Dif.
Info. Fair
Career Ctr.
Athletes Mtg.
Music
Leadership Op.
Study Abroad
Religious Life
SESSIONS